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ABSTRACT

Educational public relations (PR) is a planned and systematic management function designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. The standards and techniques discussed in this guide are based on the nearly 50 years of experience of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). The guidebook offers advice on establishing an evaluation procedure and setting standards for organizing a comprehensive PR program. The NSPRA Program Evaluation instrument is provided and concerns the following: (1) policy statements and procedures; (2) staffing; (3) budget/resources; (4) relationship of PR professional to the governing body, the administration, and staff of the school district; and (5) function of the PR unit. When to conduct a communication audit, topics audits cover, and the five basic steps of an audit are explained along with some principles in writing objectives for a school PR program. A checklist approach to evaluation, designed to call attention to PR responsibilities of school employees and officials, targets board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, guidance counselors, and secretaries. Checklists are also provided with criteria for publications and radio/video programs. A list of tips and techniques on PR evaluation concludes the guide. The appendixes contain 28 references and NSPRA's standards for educational PR programs and professionals, code of ethics, profile, and resources. (MLF)

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Evaluating Your School PR Investment

EA 018 098

Preface

Evaluation Starts Here: What Is School Public Relations?

As we begin this guidebook, Evaluating Your School PR Investment, it is essential that we address what we mean by school public relations. Unfortunately, common "street" definitions of school public relations, or public relations as applied to any other activity for that matter, are often warped distortions of the true concept.

Public relations is often seen as a cover-up, as putting your best institutional foot forward, or just the "good news." At its worst, public relations is seen as a manipulative black art aimed at making people believe something that is not true or coercing them to do something that someone else wants them to do.

We can no longer afford such a naive understanding of a function so basic to the successful operation of our schools. The fact is that public relations is an integral, inescapable part of school management. It is more than just news releases or speeches or slide shows, more than open house programs and newsletters, much more than just communications. The heart of the public relations concept is action in the public interest.

Here's how the National School Public Relations Association explains it in the preamble to its officially adopted Standards for Educational Public Relations Programs:

Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Educational public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and information activities which earn public understanding and support.

Public relations is first doing a good job--and then making sure people know about it. That's the starting point, the foundation, for the evaluation techniques in this guidebook.

These materials and ideas conscientiously applied will make a difference. The result will be better school public relations programs and that means better schools.

John H. Wherry, ASPR
National School Public Relations Association
Executive Director

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NSPRA
National School Public Relations Association

Introduction and Acknowledgements

The purpose of Evaluating Your School PR Investment: A Guidebook for Evaluating School Public Relations is to assist school officials in two ways. The first is to share some insight on evaluating school PR programs and how to make PR better and more accountable in school systems across America. The second is to assist school officials in setting public relations standards and organizing their public relations programs.

Evaluations are known to cause some "professional discomfort" when evaluators begin looking at what you do in a setting that you understand best. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) recognizes that the best evaluation instruments and techniques are tied to the local needs of the school community, and this publication offers ample examples to use effectively in your own system.

The standards and techniques mentioned in this publication are based on NSPRA's nearly 50 years of working with schools and their public relations programs and activities, as well as a comprehensive review of evaluation research in public relations.

NSPRA's Evaluating Your School PR Investment was written by Rich Bagin, ASPR*, Director of Association Development, at NSPRA. Consultants for the guidebook were John Wherry, Ed.D., ASPR, Executive Director of NSPRA; Virginia M. Ross, Director of Public Relations at NSPRA; and four former NSPRA Presidents: Larry Ascough, Special Assistant to the Superintendent-Communications for the Dallas Independent School District (Texas); Don Bagin, Ed.D., Professor of Communications at Glassboro State College (New Jersey); Joseph Davis, Ed.D., Adjunct Professor of Educational Administration at Ohio State University; and Kenneth Muir, Ed.D., ASPR, Director of the Department of Information for the Montgomery County Schools (Maryland).

Joanna Matthews, Editorial and Production Specialist at NSPRA, completed production, coordination, and paste-up.

*NSPRA accredited

An Overview: Assessing the Return on the School Public Relations Investment

"The tools for evaluating a PR program have to be home-grown because no standard instrument is available or probably even possible . . . There are, however, within the day-to-day operation of every school organization, many vehicles for evaluation—some simple and inexpensive, others complex and costly."

Dr. Joseph Davis
NSPRA National Seminar
1973

Not that much has changed in evaluation since Joe Davis made those comments over a decade ago. The best PR evaluation techniques are still based on the needs of the local program, but we have progressed in the number of techniques available, as well as in recognizing the need to prove the effectiveness of our school PR programs.

Most authors of public relations textbooks and articles are quick to note that evaluation is the most neglected part of PR. Many practitioners feel that the time and money devoted to evaluation could be better spent on providing additional PR services.

But, as any school PR professional can tell you, closer scrutiny is being paid to the tax dollars spent on PR programs. That's why you should measure the effectiveness of the program. The results should demonstrate that there is a valuable return for the PR investment.

The purpose of PR evaluations are many, but four major points are:

- to improve, add, or drop existing PR activities
- to determine if the PR program is achieving its intended results
- to determine if the results were worth the time and money spent
- to bring greater management visibility to the accomplishments of the PR program.

We have learned that it is necessary not only to look at the organization and implementation of the PR program, but we also need to measure the effectiveness of what we do. It may be no longer acceptable to say you have a newsletter mailed to all homes in your community six times a year. You need to know if the newsletter is good or bad and what effect it has on its readers.

What is your school public relations program worth to your school board and community? Why do you publish an annual report and offer a weekly radio show? Why are you publishing a weekly employee newsletter? What effect do these activities have on the day-to-day operation of your school district? What behavior or attitude changes do you expect from your community because of the new community education program?

Most school PR evaluations do not attempt to answer these questions. Generally, evaluations assess whether deadlines are

met, publications are readable and informative, and your school district is receiving its share of "good press." In some cases, the ultimate evaluation is the passage or defeat of a bond referendum.

Another piece in the PR evaluation puzzle deals with the assessment of the type of community your school district is serving.

Bill Banach, ASPR and former NSPRA President, notes that different types of PR programs are needed for stable and dynamic communities. He refers to research showing that in a stable and homogeneous environment, a school district can use more formal, structured, and central communication techniques. But, in a complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic environment, communication must be more targeted, informal, and decentralized. Consequently, an evaluation procedure must account for the type of community and whether the current PR program is communicating with a standing or moving target.

When To Evaluate?

Two types of evaluation are commonly practiced in school districts.

The first is formative evaluation in which activities are monitored throughout the year so course corrections can be made to improve an ongoing program.

The second is summative evaluation which annually reviews the total PR program. The summative evaluation looks at each PR product or activity after it has been completed and assesses whether it was a valuable asset to the total PR program. The PR program is then evaluated on its total year-round efforts and accomplishments.

NSPRA recommends that both forms of evaluation be implemented. The dynamics of the PR function call for ongoing course corrections while the overall assessment of the sum of the PR activities and products is also a key component of PR planning and evaluation.

Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher in the third edition of The School and Community Relations (1984) offer four common errors in evaluation which they labeled "Myths about Measurement." The myths are:

- Dissemination is communication. Just because you publish and deliver 20,000 newsletters a month doesn't necessarily mean you are communicating. You need to account for targeted audiences, interest levels, and educational backgrounds of your readership.

- Efforts can be equated with results. If your program is not targeted and does not realistically deal with attainable objectives and goals, working 60 hours a week may not move your PR program forward.

- Samples are representative. Too frequently decisions may be made based on the thoughts of a small sample of the community. Results of scientific surveys are the base-line data to use in making major decisions about PR or other school programs.

- Increased knowledge means more favorable attitudes. Knowledge of a subject doesn't necessarily convert to favorable opinions. No amount of publicity can turn a basically bad policy into a good one. As Nolte noted in Fundamentals of Public Relations: Professional Guidelines, Concepts and Integrations (1979), "A skunk cannot be made to smell good by saying it really does not smell bad."

Evaluation to date has primarily focused on the areas of (1) organization, planning, and management; (2) the success of the individual activities and products; and (3) the quantity of positive publicity generated by the PR office.

The organization, planning, and management of the PR office is assessed through general management evaluations in most school districts. Individual activities and products are evaluated by participants and readers through various feedback techniques, such as observations, readership surveys, checklist approaches, and focus groups. News clips and air time are measured and reported in monthly or periodic review sessions.

But a recent doctoral dissertation study by Terry Oberg found that 57% of all public relations programs sampled received no formal evaluation by their school districts. In that same study, Oberg asked NSPRA members (see profile of NSPRA in Appendix) their perceptions of valid evaluation techniques in assessing PR program activities. The results in descending order of perceived validity are:

1. Scientific random surveys and/or informal questionnaires to evaluate how well the district is communicating with the public.
2. Soliciting input of news media representatives for improving how well district news is coming across.
3. Telephone surveys of community residents to determine readership and comprehension of school publications and news stories.
4. Questionnaires included in school newsletters to determine readership and comprehension and to solicit ideas for improvement.
5. Management by objectives.
6. Employing the services of independent consultants to evaluate school publications.
7. Soliciting input from public relations consultants.
8. Establishing a district publications committee to evaluate school publications.
9. Maintaining a complete log of the use of PR staff time.
10. Counting the number of news stories and/or column inches devoted to a school district by area newspapers.
11. Counting citizen attendance at back-to-school affairs and parent-teacher conferences.
12. Counting citizen attendance at school programs and school board meetings.

He also asked those same NSPRA members to rank a list of 25 PR results that school districts could use to measure PR success. The 10 most highly rated results were:

1. People move to the community because of its schools.
2. School financial issues are passed in elections.
3. The media regularly cover school board meetings.
4. The media provide coverage for school special events.
5. Regular feedback comes from key communicators.
6. The percentage of eligible voters who participate in school/financial (bond, budget) elections is calculated.
7. All district-media communications go through the PR director (even in crisis situations).
8. The responses to either mailed or phone surveys are counted.
9. The number of volunteers taking part in school activities is determined.
10. The number of inquiries and complaints to the district is determined.

One final note to the Oberg study is that the PR directors also offered (in an open-ended comment section) the PR products they

Internal Or External Evaluation

Should you do your own program evaluation or hire an outside resource person? The answer is yes. For certain evaluations dealing with products, activities, or management by objectives review, an internal evaluation will, for the most part, be effective and economical. For a school district audit or comprehensive survey, an external evaluator may be the better choice.

The advantages and disadvantages of internal versus external evaluations as seen by evaluation specialists are:

External Evaluator

Advantages:

1. Has more competence in program evaluation techniques.
2. Brings the objectivity of an outside observer.
3. Has no vested interest in program outcomes.
4. Takes the major part of the evaluation burden from the PR staff.

Disadvantages:

1. Will take longer to understand a program and the evaluation requirements.
2. Lacks ongoing working relationships with program staff and school and district personnel.
3. Is seen as an outsider by program staff.
4. May not always match local needs' time schedule.

Internal Evaluator

Advantages:

1. Is apt to be more familiar with the total school setting.
2. Has established working relationships with program staff.
3. Understands channels of communications within the school, the school district, and the community.
4. Is familiar with all details of the program.
5. Has a personal interest in the success of the program.

Disadvantages:

1. May have a vested interest in program's outcome.
2. May reflect bias of program staff in the design and report.
3. May be overburdened by other duties and unable to devote adequate time to the program evaluation.
4. May not have skills required in evaluation.

found most important in evaluating their efforts. The five most frequent were:

1. Financial responses (bond issues passed, budget issues passed, good bond rating).

2. Good media coverage (frequent coverage, positive coverage, calls to school to check rumors).

3. Feedback from the community (comments from citizens, business support, letters to the editor).

4. Response to surveys (quick returns, large number of responses, positive results).

5. Feedback from staff (tips on items to publicize, comments, requests for information).

This guidebook offers advice on establishing an evaluation procedure and setting standards for organizing a comprehensive PR program. Various techniques for measuring programs and activities are given. It is up to you to choose which techniques will work best for your school program.

Two major evaluation targets for PR professionals to aim for are (1) to measure understanding, attitudes, opinions, and behavior changes in targeted publics; and (2) to ensure that evaluation techniques are a well-coordinated and unobtrusive part of the everyday PR program.

One closing thought to remember is that the results of this year's evaluation should be the starting point of next year's PR plan. Use evaluation results not only to document your success and credibility, but also to ensure that you use what you learned to build a better program.

NSPRA Program Evaluation Instrument

The NSPRA Program Evaluation Instrument may be used as a basis for evaluating the extent to which the school district has made provisions for organizing and conducting a formal public relations program. The instrument does not indicate how good or how bad the school district PR program is.

If the program evaluation is performed realistically and honestly, it should identify strengths and weaknesses of the school district program and provide a factual basis for strengthening it.

The instrument is based on the current NSPRA Program Standards, the first NSPRA evaluation instrument developed in 1972, and evaluation research. No rating scale is assigned to items but division headings can help you pinpoint and correct weak areas.

I. Policy Statements and Procedures

Yes	No	
☐	☐	1. The school district has adopted a clear and concise policy statement on its PR program.
☐	☐	2. The policy statement includes the purposes of the PR program.
☐	☐	3. The policy statement identifies to whom PR authority is delegated.
☐	☐	4. The policy statement clearly indicates the extent of authority delegated.
☐	☐	5. The policy statement is available for staff and citizen review in each school building.
☐	☐	6. The policy statement has been reviewed by the governing body within the past two years.
☐	☐	7. The school district has developed clear and concise administrative procedures that outline major components of the PR programs, detail rules and regulations, and specify employee roles and responsibilities.
☐	☐	8. Administrative procedures have been distributed and are available for staff and citizen review in each school building.

II. Staffing

Commitment to the achievement of the purposes of the school district's PR policy should be demonstrated by allocating adequate human and financial resources to the PR program.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	1. The PR program has been assigned to an individual who reports directly to the chief executive officer and who participates as a full member of the administrative cabinet.
☐	☐	2. Recognition of PR as a management function of primary importance is demonstrated through the existence of a unit staffed by full-time professional PR personnel.
☐	☐	3. The staffing of a PR program will vary according to a school district's size, needs, environment, and availability of resources. Staff size is sufficient to accomplish the objectives of the school district and to cope with the variety of inherent conditions and problems. (See related box, "Staffing—How Big? How Small?")
☐	☐	4. The PR staff meets the National School Public Relations Association Standards for Educational Public Relations Professionals. (See Appendix.)
☐	☐	5. Adequate clerical and support assistance is provided for the PR unit.
☐	☐	6. A systematic procedure exists for sending professional staff members to professional PR meetings, including NSPRA seminars and conferences.
☐	☐	7. The registration fee and expenses of the professional staff attending NSPRA national or special seminars are paid by the school district.
☐	☐	8. In-service professional growth activities relevant to the PR staff are supported at the same level of support as those provided for the general professional staff of the school district.
☐	☐	9. The salaries and fringe benefits of PR professionals are provided at the same level of support as comparable cabinet-level positions held within the school district.

III. Budget/Resources

Operating budgets should include sufficient funds for the PR services and programs recommended in these standards. Provision for financing should be based on such factors as enrollment, total operational expenditures, and special communication needs of the organization. Major PR services to be financed, other than staff, should include:

Yes	No	
		1. Materials and equipment.
☐	☐	a. Sufficient supplies are provided for a program to meet the objectives and commitments of the PR unit.
☐	☐	b. Work stations (desks, chairs, bookcases, filing cabinets) are provided for all staff assigned to the PR unit.
☐	☐	c. The PR unit has adequate word processing and computer equipment available.

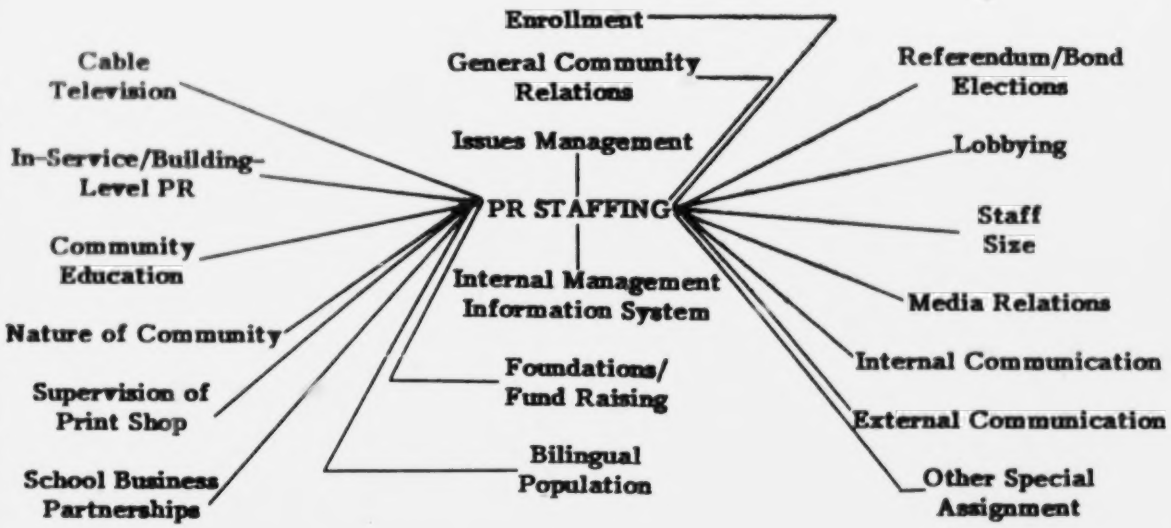
Staffing: How Big? How Small?

Establishing rigid national guidelines for the number of PR professionals needed by a school district breaks a basic rule of communication--knowing and understanding your audience. Just as the nearly 16,000 school districts across America are alike—they are also different. Consequently, to recommend three professional PR staff members for a system of 35,000 students for one system may be far too few or far too many, depending on local variables and functions.

A full-service PR operation offers a host of services to school employees and community taxpayers. And that's another reason it is difficult to recommend the number of staff members needed for your school PR program.

Below is a graphic representation of some of the services provided by a comprehensive PR office, as well as additional factors affecting PR staffing requirements.

Factors Affecting PR Staffing Requirements



The enrollment size and nature of community affect the role and efficiency of the PR operation. Larger systems provide more opportunities and problems in the PR arena while a smaller, stable community usually doesn't create as much activity for the PR office. Small, but active heterogeneous publics can generate as much activity for a PR office as many larger, stable communities.

Compound the size and nature features with special PR tasks, such as passing bond elections, coordinating school-business partnerships and internal management information systems, and conducting a community education program, and you can see why the number of PR professionals required must be a local decision. In working with school districts for nearly a half century, NSPRA and its members recognize the need to have a minimum of one full-time professional person for a minimum school PR program. Large systems need more staff members, but the key to staffing revolves about the scope of the PR program, the nature of the community, and the additional assignments given to the PR office.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	d. Reproduction equipment and supplies (mimeograph, art materials, Xerox, etc.) are assigned or readily available to the PR unit.
		2. Facilities.
☐	☐	a. The PR unit has adequate telephone facilities.
☐	☐	b. The PR unit has suitable spaces readily available for staff conferences, media briefings, etc.
☐	☐	c. The PR unit has adequate working spaces for professional staff members (minimum of 125 sq. feet of office space per staff member).
☐	☐	d. The PR unit has adequate working space for secretarial and clerical staff members (minimum of 75 sq. feet per employee, exclusive of storage and filing space).
		3. Technical services—publications, advertising, computer assistance, audiovisuals, radio, television, etc.
☐	☐	a. The PR unit has subscriptions to appropriate local, state, and national print and electronic media.
☐	☐	b. If appropriate to local and state conditions, the PR unit has budget for and access to advertising space or radio/TV time.
☐	☐	c. The PR unit has access to audiovisual services, including budget or personnel for art work and TV production and equipment to prepare film, slides, and overhead transparencies.
☐	☐	d. The PR unit has equipment for taping interviews, radio and television programs, etc., where these functions are performed within the unit, or has access to facilities for the preparation of television shorts, radio announcements, etc.
☐	☐	4. Budget is provided for evaluation and research as required by NSPRA Standards.
☐	☐	5. The PR unit has an adequate budget to accomplish its goals and objectives. (See related box, "Budget—How Big? How Small?" for additional information.)

IV. Relationship of PR Professional to the Governing Body, the Administration, and Staff of the School District

Yes	No	
☐	☐	1. The person responsible for the PR unit is involved in planning, PR counseling, and developing a communication plan for all major initiatives by the school district.
☐	☐	2. The PR unit of the school district provides counseling and consultative services to the governing body and executive management.

Budget: How Big? How Small?

Establishing an operating budget for the PR office usually runs into the "apples and oranges" argument. If you account for every tangible activity or product generated by a PR office and account for the PR staff and supplies, NSPRA members report that a comprehensive PR office can adequately function in the range of .3 to 1% of the total school district budget.

You can easily reach the 1% figure and higher if you begin assigning 10% of your principals' salaries to PR and up to 50% of your superintendent's salary since recent studies show that nearly 65% of a chief executive officer's time is spent on communications and public relations activities.

Some school districts use the 1% figure on a programmatic approach. For example, a K-12 counseling program may cost a suburban school district $525,000. Of that amount, 1% or $5,200 is budgeted for PR activities or products for the district-wide counseling product.

One final word on PR budgets is "accountability." Compute the cost per taxpayer for the PR program and also research the average school tax bill in your school district. One Pennsylvania school district did this a few years ago and found that the average school tax bill was $800 and that the PR program cost each taxpayer just one dollar. The PR budget was then presented in a fashion to note that only one dollar was being spent to tell taxpayers what happened to the remaining $799. Public relations provided accountability and, in this case, PR stood for Public Responsibility.

Yes	No		
☐	☐	3.	The PR unit provides counseling or consultative services to the entire staff or membership of the school district within the purposes of the unit.
☐	☐	4.	Research and programmatic information are directly accessible to the PR unit.
☐	☐	5.	Suggestions of the PR unit for research studies are subject to the same criteria as suggestions from other units in establishing priorities, with additional consideration being given for crisis situations.
☐	☐	6.	Research studies initiated by the PR unit are supported at a budget level equivalent to studies initiated by other units of the school district.
☐	☐	7.	The PR unit has timely access to all school officials and employees at the district and building levels.
☐	☐	8.	The PR unit has the authority and responsibility to serve as school district spokesperson on education and management issues.
☐	☐	9.	The PR unit is informed as soon as possible of all major actions of consequence in the school district.
☐	☐	10.	The PR unit coordinates the actions of the person charged with the communications responsibilities for special projects within the school district.

Yes	No		
		V. Function of the PR Unit	
☐	☐	1.	The PR unit develops an annual plan of action that lists by objectives, audiences, and activities and provides a framework for evaluation.
☐	☐	2.	The PR unit, working with the key managers of the school district, annually sets priorities for the PR program.
		Internal Program	
☐	☐	3.	A sound and effective system of internal communications has been established.
☐	☐	4.	The internal program identifies specific individuals and groups within a school district with which continuous communications and relationships are required.
☐	☐	5.	The internal program contacts these designated individuals and groups on a regular basis.
☐	☐	6.	The internal program conducts formal and informal in-service training to help the school staff understand, value, and use PR.
☐	☐	7.	The internal program regularly surveys the staff of the school district to establish information needs and priorities.
☐	☐	8.	The internal program has designated liaison representatives from each major unit of the school district to ensure coverage of those units.
☐	☐	9.	The internal program publishes an employee newsletter with contents carefully selected to reflect priorities identified by the staff of the school district.
☐	☐	10.	The internal program has tested all media available to it (including printed, electronic, and face-to-face meetings) to determine the most effective ways of communicating with the staff of the school district on the following criteria:
☐	☐		• Immediate communication to staff.
☐	☐		• Immediate communication from staff.
☐	☐		• Ongoing communication to staff.
☐	☐		• Ongoing communication from staff.
☐	☐	11.	The internal program solicits, through formal and informal means (survey, suggestion box, advisory committee, focus groups, personal contacts) feedback on its activities, its products, and its purposes, with focus on internal communications.
☐	☐	12.	The internal program makes periodic studies of information requests, requests filled, requests unfilled, with focus on internal communications.
☐	☐	13.	The internal program uses feedback continuously to modify its operations, as necessary.
☐	☐	14.	The internal program periodically analyzes all

Yes	No		Yes	No	
		feedback with the purpose of evaluating the mission, objectives, activities, and products of the unit.			determine whether it is representative of major developments in the school district.
☐	☐	15. The internal program periodically elicits suggestions and criticisms from each unit of the school district concerning internal communications.	☐	☐	22. Major policy changes, key administrative appointments, budgetary allocations, and major activities are included in the information and/or news items initiated by the PR unit.
☐	☐	16. The internal program conducts at least one formal in-service PR training course and/or PR workshop annually.	☐	☐	23. The PR unit periodically studies information requests, requests filled, requests unfilled, with focus on external communications.
☐	☐	17. Every staff person or member in the school district is involved in the in-service program over a reasonable time.	☐	☐	24. The external program establishes priorities of recurring information needs from the requests received.
☐	☐	18. The internal program provides technical and consultative service in establishing and maintaining building-level PR programs.	☐	☐	25. These priority information needs are made known within the school district.
		External Program	☐	☐	26. The PR unit ensures follow-through within the school district on information requests.
☐	☐	19. The external program identifies specific individuals and community groups with whom continuous communications and relationships are required. Targeting of those publics has been completed.	☐	☐	27. The PR unit maintains records and logs mass media interest in and use of information concerning the school district.
☐	☐	20. The external program communicates with or otherwise contacts each of the identified individuals and groups at least monthly and on special occasions.	☐	☐	28. The PR unit tests its dissemination of information through the various communication techniques and channels by comparing effectiveness of communication accomplishments through different channels.
☐	☐	21. The external program periodically analyzes information it provides to	☐	☐	29. In selecting appropriate communication channels, the PR unit attempts to

Yes	No	
		capitalize on the particular needs of each of the media.
☐	☐	30. The PR unit ensures that a regular and continuing effort is made to involve the news media--newspapers, radio, TV, and cable TV.
☐	☐	31. The PR unit elicits, through formal and informal means (surveys, advisory committees, personal contacts, etc.) feedback on activities, its products, and its purposes, with focus on external communications.
☐	☐	32. The PR unit monitors the media for unsolicited comments related to the mission of the school district (editorials, letters to the editor, talk shows, etc.)
☐	☐	33. The PR unit uses external feedback continuously to modify its operations as necessary.
☐	☐	34. The PR unit analyzes all external feedback frequently to evaluate the mission, objectives, activities, and products of the unit.
☐	☐	35. The PR unit frequently, but at least annually, elicits suggestions from the media and identified individuals in the school district external communications channels.
☐	☐	36. The PR unit has systematically identified community media, such as the daily and weekly press; television; cable; radio; and PTA, industrial, business, real estate, labor, civic, and religious "house organs" and has identified contact people who can place copy in those media (reporter, editor, etc.).
☐	☐	37. The PR unit has systematically identified community organizations and individuals who have potential ability to help the school district and has placed them on a special target communication list.
☐	☐	38. The PR unit involves organizational resources and resources of the general community in the PR program and the instructional program of the school district.

Crisis Planning

☐	☐	39. The school district has developed a plan of anticipating, preparing for, and dealing with the PR aspects of a crisis situation.
☐	☐	40. The crisis-situation plan identifies the specific responsibilities of the PR unit and the specific procedures to be followed.
☐	☐	41. The PR unit is represented and recognized on any crisis-situation ad hoc group, task force, or committee to provide advisory and consultative services.
☐	☐	42. The crisis-situation plan is updated annually, preferably before a new school year begins.

Long-Range Planning

☐	☐	43. The school district provides for long-range PR planning.

Yes	No		Yes	No	
☐	☐	44. A PR planning group reviews and makes recommendations annually to the chief executive or governing body of the school district.			**Evaluation**
☐	☐	45. The review and recommendations include the purposes of the PR program, the relationship of the PR unit to the school district and to the community, and the evaluation reports on the PR unit.	☐	☐	47. The PR unit evaluates its activities in relation to its operational plan and the school district environment at least once annually.
☐	☐	46. The PR planning group recommends innovative avenues of communications and relationships for internal and external publics based on information from the PR unit's feedback and research.	☐	☐	48. The staff of the school district is represented in samples that provide data on which evaluations are based.
			☐	☐	49. The results of the annual evaluation are used as data for the following year's PR plan.
			☐	☐	50. Ongoing evaluation techniques are used to keep PR activities on track.

Two Systematic Approaches: Communication Audits and Evaluating PR Objectives

Two systematic approaches to evaluation in public relations are communication audits and evaluation of PR objectives. The audit evaluation system is a good place to start when the results can be used in planning new strategies and activities to achieve the overall goals of a school system. Evaluating PR objectives is a natural followup to the audit as new, measurable objectives are usually generated from it. In both cases, top management must be committed to acting on recommendations or the lengthy evaluation process will become a frustrating game played by a select few and most likely enjoyed by none.

Communication Audits

Mention an audit to school district officials and most think of money and "where will we put the auditors for the next few weeks." The communication audit brings a new dimension of assessment to schools and is perhaps the best way to see if your PR program is on track.

A communication audit is an analysis of your school district's communications—internal and external. It is designed to take a snapshot of your system's communication needs, policies, activities, capabilities, and programs. It involves staff and community leaders and leads to a set of recommendations from a communication expert to be acted upon by your administrative cabinet and school board.

A comprehensive audit will uncover communication gaps and suggest:

- short- and long-term goals
- priority of those goals
- themes/issues to be emphasized
- priority list of publics
- community pulse on key issues
- communication methods that are working
- new communication methods warranted
- a measuring stick for future evaluation.

The audit is perhaps the best method to evaluate a long-term program in school PR. It pinpoints strengths and weaknesses, uncovers needs, and usually gives validity for doing more in school PR.

When to Conduct an Audit

Eleven instances when you may want to consider an audit are:

1. When the Director of Public Relations or designated PR administrator is new on the job.
2. When there is a new Superintendent of Schools.
3. When there is a newly elected/appointed majority to the school board.
4. When your school district merges with another or goes through a desegregation experience.

5. When your school district seems to be losing students to private/parochial schools.

6. When a long-term PR program has not been totally evaluated for five or more years.

7. When community demographics change drastically because of a business opening or closing, suburban flight, etc.

8. When the Director of Public Relations needs a clearer mandate from management and the school board.

9. When a periodic comprehensive evaluation is required.

10. When employee unrest has lowered morale and productivity.

11. When a new initiative is being planned, such as a comprehensive community education program, school construction campaign, etc.

Topics Audits Cover

Major topics covered in school district audits include:

- Communication philosophy: review of formal policies, management's openness, management's support of communication, role of PR office, centralized versus decentralized approach, etc.

- Community demographics: analysis of who is there now and who may be there in five years, activity or stability of the community, private school students, percentage of non-parents, etc.

- Objectives and goals of school district and PR office.

- Organization and staffing of PR office.

- Existing PR program: review of products, activities, and general program for internal and external public relations.

- Attitudes toward present PR program: internal and external publics report on current program—its strengths and weaknesses.

- Needs and expectations: feedback from all consulted groups.

Five Basic Steps

A school district communication audit follows five basic steps:

1. Researching—reviewing current program and data on school/community.

2. Finding out what "we" think: talking to key management and assessing the school district's strengths and weaknesses in instruction, management, and public relations.

3. Finding out what "they" think: going to key internal and external publics and seeking their opinions on strengths and weaknesses in instruction, management, and public relations.

4. Evaluating the difference between what "we" and "they" said: developing a PR balance sheet of assets, liabilities, strengths, and weaknesses.

5. Recommending how to close the gaps uncovered in the audit.

Completing the Audit

Research is the first step in completing the audit. You need to gather, review, and analyze all components of the current PR program, demogaphic information about the community, and statistics about students—test scores, post-high school career/college choices, etc. In summary, you must review all you can to draw a "paper profile" of the school district.

The second step is to hold a planning meeting to determine the audit's objectives, to identify possible questions for interviews, to plan your approach, and to develop a

Audit the Nature of Your Community

Determining the nature of your community is often a first step in a communication audit. The Banach-Stech Communication Audit system sees it this way:

If You Have . . .

a homogeneous community
a simple, stable environment
a slow rate of change
little management teamwork
a basic educational program

You Ought to Have . . .

a management system that is consistent and controlled

This Requires . . .

less overall communication, including lower levels of communication with employees, parents and other citizens, and between departments, work units, and school buildings

If You Have . . .

a diverse community
a dynamic, complex environment
a rapid rate of change
an integrated management team
a diverse educational program

You Ought to Have . . .

a management system that is adaptable, flexible, and open

This Requires . . .

higher levels of overall communication, including higher levels of formal and semiformal communication with employees, higher levels of formal and informal communication with parents and other citizens, and higher levels of information and semiformal communication beween departments, units, and school buildings

Source: The Banach-Stech Communication Audit, 1981

schedule. If a consultant is hired to conduct your audit, make sure he/she meets with the planning group before the process begins. Planning groups usually consist of the PR staff, superintendent or designate, a principal from each level, a representative from each employee classification, a community leader, and PTA representative, etc.

- **Top Management Interviewed**

The next step is to begin the process of finding out what "we" think. Interview the top management of the school district to determine its attitudes and beliefs about communication and the district's communication problems. Use prepared questionnaires to help guide the interview. Questions should deal with strengths and weaknesses of the school district, general communication channels, effectiveness of current vehicles, problem areas, and future directions and expectations (outcomes) of the PR program. What behavior changes in employees and taxpayers are expected because of the PR program? Also, ask top management to recommend external publics for audit focus groups and survey responses. If the size of your district warrants it, it may be beneficial to conduct a similar session with a cross section of your principals.

Employee Responses

Employees are next on the list to be interviewed. Either survey or interview in focus group settings a cross section of employees. Ask the same types of questions of employees but add their opinions on building-level communication and public relations programs. Make sure that employees understand the purposes of the audit and that their responses will remain anonymous.

Developing a Questionnaire

From the input you receive from the top management and employee interviews and surveys, draft a questionnaire to use with key external publics. Again, you can use the questionnaire to guide a focus group discussion, to be mailed to identified key publics, or to be used for a telephone survey. Design the survey to ascertain what "they" think about your school district and their identification of strengths and weaknesses of the PR program.

Analyze Data

After all the results are in, tabulate the data and analyze the gaps uncovered by the audit. Base recommendations on the analysis of the data and the research completed on

Audit—What's in a Name

The audit process described in this chapter deals with a look at an entire PR program. Other audits look at pieces of programs or evaluations of current services.

Robert Sherwin, a communications specialist for the Portland Public Schools (Oregon) is using a media effectiveness audit. The assessment was designed to evaluate the sources of stories interpreting the school district, the PR impact of those stories, and whether the communications staff had any influence on use of the stories. Stories were clipped; documented for source, category, and issue; and rated by an outside panel (three principals and three professionals outside of the school) on whether the clipping made a positive impression on them.

Kenneth Calkins, communications coordinator for the Highline School District (Washington) conducted an audit of the 41 separate functions provided by his office. Ken reports,

> "Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) members attending one of the monthly informal meetings with the Superintendent formed one of the survey groups. The other three were elementary principals, secondary principals, and central office administrators. Each group was given a list of 41 services currently being performed by the Community Information Office. They were asked to pick 10 services as being among the more important and worthy of retention. From these 10 they were to select five; from the five, two; and from the two, one. Point value was given to each selection."

The results of this survey showed agreement between the PTSA and the elementary principals and a different set of priorities by the central office and secondary principals. He ranked his results by "top priority," "high priority," "moderate priority," and "receiving low or no priority." Calkins said, "Some of the low priority services likely will be continued . . . However, other services listed on the low priority list will be examined with an aim toward their elimination."

the current PR program.

Recommendations

Present a final report to the management team with recommendations for action. It will be the first time the team members will see what their anonymous colleagues had to say, as well as their employees and key community leaders. Stress that the commitment made to the audit process will be nil, unless follow-up action is taken.

Audits often create a new perspective on public relations among school administrators and employees. They see the need for a systematic approach to school PR and realize that publicity and one-shot activities do not constitute a PR program. The results of audits usually lead to new PR plans, strategies, and objectives which, when drafted correctly, can assist in the annual evaluation of your PR program.

Evaluating PR Objectives

Much of what school PR programs do is measurable. To deny that a large portion of PR deals with human relations, courtesy, good will, and persuading people to like and support our schools would be wrong. But most PR activities produce results that are measurable and that can help prove the worth of your PR program.

The evaluation of PR objectives is defined by Nager and Allen in Public Relations: Management by Objectives as a total mangaement system that focuses on results rather that on activities for performance evaluation. They also ask us to consider the following questions about the practice of PR:

1. Why is public relations vital to your organization's management?
2. What does public relations do for the organization?
3. How are public relations priorities set?
4. How is the public relations department evaluated?
5. How effectively are public relations resources utilized?
6. To what results can the public relations department point?
7. How does the public relations department support and contribute to the organization's goals?

If you can specifically answer those questions, you are probably practicing a results-oriented PR operation.

The PR objective approach to evaluation allows you to tie your objectives into your school district goals. It also permits you to focus on those areas where you feel measurable results will do your program and school district the most good. School PR offices are usually understaffed and, thus, do not have the time or staff to implement a comprehensive evaluation using PR objectives.

Consequently, leading professionals place a priority on which PR objectives will be measured and monitored and which will have to wait until another year. In all cases, they don't allow the measuring of results to inordinately interfere with the smooth operation of the PR office. The evaluation of PR objectives must become part of the office's routine or it may not be worth the extra effort. Ways are often found to insert some evaluative questions into feedback devices already planned for regular programs throughout the year.

Some PR people view evaluating objectives as just a "numbers-for-numbers-sake" game, but if used effectively, it can enhance the credibility and management status of the PR program. The advice from PR specialists using PR objectives in evaluation is to move as much as you can toward measurable objectives. Your first attempts at PR objective evaluation will be far from perfect, but as you move toward measurability, you will gain the respect of your colleagues because you are charting a path as to why an

investment in PR is a sound strategy for your school system.

Writing School PR Objectives

Some guiding principles in writing objectives for your school PR program are:

1. Do not confuse what the PR person does—the process—with what you want your employees or public to do—the outcome. The majority of well-written objectives focuses on outcomes.

2. Ask yourself how nitty-gritty you want the objectives to be. McElrath in Systematic Public Relations notes that the level of specificity will depend on your willingness and ability to budget and to collect such data. There is little purpose in spending much time in specifying objectives that will not be monitored or used in budget requests and evaluation.

3. Use active words. Be direct, specific, and brief. Objectives should create word pictures about what is to be done and what is to be expected. Edit and rework. Remember, objectives will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of your program. Consequently, be specific and realistic.

4. Include a target date for completion of results.

5. Public relations objectives do not only measure tangibles, but they also document the influence, awareness, understanding, acceptance, expectations, opinions, and attitudes of employees and various external publics.

6. Whenever possible, state the degree of effect of a particular effort, as well as how the objective will be evaluated.

7. Make sure your PR objectives relate to those areas under control of the PR office. If you project to increase the number of adults in your high school community education program through a planned recruitment drive, make sure that the community education classes are worthwhile to attend. If not, the recruitment drive will fall flat—not because the communication activity is off-target, but because the community ed program lacks the substance to recruit and sustain students. **In writing objectives, choose only those areas over which you have substantial influence.**

Let's look at how these guidelines may work in practice. The first draft of an objective on internal communication may read: "Develop effective communication practices with employees during the next year."

Need Auditing Assistance?

School districts considering a communication audit may want to contact the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) for consulting assistance.

NSPRA maintains a membership talent bank that identifies members with expertise in auditing and evaluation.

NSPRA also offers consultative contract services to school districts to complete communication audits, evaluations, PR plans, etc.

Contact NSPRA at (703) 528-5840 for further information.

The second draft could make it more specific by naming a vehicle, date, purpose, and evaluation component.

> **By November, an employee advisory council will meet with the superintendent on the second Wednesday of each month for the purpose of two-way employee communication and increased understanding of the planned magnet school program. In June,**

participants will be surveyed on the council's effectiveness.

Other PR programmatic objectives may call for increasing attendance at teacher/parent conferences, adding to the volunteers working in your school, establishing business-school partnerships, and increasing public support by senior citizens. Most of these objectives are measurable through documentation or by surveying your public or employee attitudes.

One more point on PR objective writing: when writing PR objectives for the first time, many writers forget to ask the "To Do What?" question of objective writing. For example, an objective may read, "To publish six community newsletters during the next fiscal year." That objective describes a process and not a product. What's the purpose of the newsletter? What will the newsletters do for your school district? What will readers be expected to do because they read the newsletter?

"To increase public acceptance of our magnet school program by 25 percent, six issues of the community newsletter will be mailed every other month to all homes in our community." This objective not only tells what is expected, but also establishes a need for a pre- and post-survey of a sampling of readers to effectively evaluate what "acceptance" increases were made. You could also use the pre-survey to determine the content of your six newsletters.

Evaluation Using PR Objectives

Once you have established your objectives and the predetermined implementation period has elapsed, it's time to evaluate your PR program.

First, gather all your quantifiable data from monitoring, surveys, focus groups, informal feedback methods, and other documentation devices and compare the results with the original objectives. Determine if the objectives have been met and if not, why. Plan recommendations for changing and improving the PR program for the next year.

Next, report the results to your administrative cabinet and stress which objectives were met and how they neatly mesh with the total goals of your school district. Also, propose new priorities for next year's activities and measurable objectives that will assist your system in meeting the objectives not met with your present set of PR activities.

The PR objective method of evaluation calls for additional staff time and more resources to aptly document and measure results. If you have the time and money, it is the best method of evaluating a results-oriented program. If you don't, select a key objective or two to evaluate as part of your total program.

The major league first baseman who hits .350 and earns a golden glove award usually is rewarded with a lucrative contract renewal, as well as a choice of locker in the clubhouse. The PR professional who proves the performance of the PR function using PR objectives and tying them to the goals of the school district is also rewarded with continued growth of the PR function and, in some cases, with incentive pay.

Positive performance-based evaluation results are difficult for boards of education, superintendents, and baseball team owners to ignore. PR people shouldn't ignore this measurable area of evaluation either.

Checklist Approach to Evaluation

The checklist approach to evaluation as mentioned earlier in this publication, only offers a framework for assessing the surface of a public relations program, product, or activity. It doesn't offer insight into the effectiveness of the program, but it may indicate areas needing additional public relations attention.

The checklists that follow were designed to call attention to PR responsibilities of school employees and officials. Checklists are also given for the production of print and electronic media. Use the checklists to see if your employees and products are practicing these public relations techniques and activities.

In this second printing of Evaluating Your School PR Investment, a change was made to make each checklist more usable for school leaders. Each checklist is now easily reproducible to distribute to its appropriate group at an in-service workshop for school employees.

Board Members

- ☐ Are you readily accessible to media and key staff members?
- ☐ Do you always use the four-point communication test when decisions are made:
  - (1) Who needs to know this?
  - (2) What do they need to know?
  - (3) What is the best time and vehicle to communicate this?
  - (4) How will we know the message has been received?
- ☐ Do you instill in building principals their leadership role in building-level PR programs?
  student groups about schools and their operation?
- ☐ Do you appear on local television and radio interview shows?
- ☐ Do you conduct a series of informational sessions for district residents? Are you honest, prepared, and interesting?
- ☐ Do you make it a point to be informed and aware of your employees' accomplishments whether they be school related or otherwise?
- ☐ Do you send congratulatory notes to employees?
- ☐ Do you keep newspaper clippings of students' accomplishments? Do you send the students and their parents a note?
- ☐ Do you recognize the community contributions of citizens, especially those who have been involved in the schools? Do you send official letters of congratulations to them?
- ☐ Do you keep in touch with your constituency--by telephone and written materials, in addition to your personal contacts? If you have a "hot" issue, do you take a random sampling of opinion? Do you coordinate opinion polling efforts with school officials?

- ☐ Do you make sure your system develops a "welcome" brochure for visitors to school board meetings?
- ☐ Do you circulate before and after meetings and introduce yourself to those you do not know and thank them for their interest and attendance—even if you didn't like what they had to say?
- ☐ Do you take the time to ride a bus route or two during the year? You would be surprised at the rapport you can build with bus drivers and students.
- ☐ Do you make an effort to be visible at all school events—not just for a winning football team?

Some additional checklist tips are:

- ☐ Do you provide budget support for the PR program?
- ☐ Do you provide a friendly, but business-like procedure at board meetings?
- ☐ Do you welcome citizen input at board meetings in a structured agenda format?
- ☐ Do you keep extensive meetings of the board to the necessary minimum?
- ☐ Are you accessible to the media?
- ☐ Do you provide leadership within the community?
- ☐ Do you start meetings on time and schedule them so they are convenient to the public?
- ☐ Do you highlight each board meeting with recognition of the accomplishments of students, staff, and programs?
- ☐ Do you provide adequate information for residents and media at the meeting?
- ☐ Do you make sure the highlights of the board meetings are in the hands of all staff members, key citizens, and news media by the next day?
- ☐ Do you seek input of all taxpayers and not just the vocal parents in your school district?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Superintendents

- ☐ Have you established administrative procedures in support of board policy on public relations?
- ☐ Do you set a climate of openness and two-way communication with board, staff, students, and community?
- ☐ Do you establish PR goals, objectives, and plans for each year?
- ☐ Do you ensure that feedback devices are in place and credible?
- ☐ Do you provide leadership to the staff, instilling a belief that public relations is every employee's business?
- ☐ Do you establish a network of targeted audiences and effectively communicate with those groups?
- ☐ Are you readily accessible to media and key staff members?
- ☐ Do you always use the four-point communication test when decisions are made:
  - (1) Who needs to know this?
  - (2) What do they need to know?
  - (3) What is the best time and vehicle to communicate this?
  - (4) How will we know the message has been received?
- ☐ Do you instill in building principals their leadership role in building-level PR programs?
- ☐ Do you have readily available the demographic information needed to communicate effectively with your various publics?
- ☐ Do you implement PR as a management function of your school district?
- ☐ Do you keep key staff people informed on decisions made or issues percolating in your community?
- ☐ Are you visible to staff and community?
- ☐ Do you speak at least once a month to service and community groups? Do you require your principals to speak to at least three such groups a year?
- ☐ Do you encourage student groups to provide community appearances for entertainment and community-service projects?
- ☐ Do you brag with sensible pride about your student and staff accomplishments?
- ☐ Do you make sure all your school buildings appear to be "good neighbors" in their local neighborhoods?
- ☐ Do you initiate community employee/student lunches and breakfasts so that two-way communication can be practiced?
- ☐ Do you react in a professional manner to a negative story in the media?
- ☐ Do you develop wholesome, face-to-face relationships with the editors and reporters in your area?
- ☐ Did you hire a competent school PR professional to help you plan and implement your PR program?
- ☐ Did you make that PR person part of your administrative cabinet?
- ☐ Do you evaluate your PR program at least annually?
- ☐ Do you provide orientation material for all new board members as well as for board candidates?
- ☐ Do you provide resources and direction for PR in-service workshops for all employees?

- ☐ Do you assess what kinds of behavioral changes you expect as a result of the PR program?
- ☐ Do you open your school buildings and facilities to community groups and also offer or expand a community education program?
- ☐ Do you always release information internally (especially controversial information) before going to the media and to the general public?
- ☐ Do you respond promptly to telephone calls from parents and the media?
- ☐ Do you make sure that your internal communication program is ongoing and effective?
- ☐ Do you attend workshops on PR and take a few board members and principals with you?
- ☐ Do you send a letter to parents of graduating seniors thanking them for their support over the past years and encouraging them to remain active and supportive of the school district?
- ☐ Do you say or write "thank you" to students, staff, and community residents who make extra efforts?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Principals

- ☐ Do you emphasize the PR responsibilities of each staff member in your building?
- ☐ Do you provide an open, two-way leadership style to stimulate healthy communication in your building?
- ☐ Do you involve students, staff, and community in meaningful advisory roles for school programs?
- ☐ Do you publicly praise students and staff for their accomplishments?
- ☐ Do you effectively use your principal's bulletin as a PR vehicle?
- ☐ Do you have a planned, two-way communication program?
- ☐ Do you have an updated, building-level crisis communication plan?
- ☐ Do you run in-service workshops on PR for your staff members?
- ☐ Is your school building considered a "good neighbor" in your community?
- ☐ Do you know your immediate school neighbors on a face-to-face basis?
- ☐ Do you respond promptly to telephone calls from parents and the media?
- ☐ Do you have a news gathering network within your building?
- ☐ Do you know the reporters who cover your school, and have you asked them how you may be more helpful to them and they to you?
- ☐ Have you invited community groups (realtors, senior citizens, rotary, etc.) to your building?
- ☐ Do you have a building newsletter sent to parents and other key external audiences?
- ☐ Do you distribute your student newspaper or yearbook to public places within your community?
- ☐ Do you encourage volunteers to work in your building?
- ☐ Are you visible to staff and students?
- ☐ Are you accessible to staff and students?
- ☐ Do you periodically survey your students, staff, and parents on school-related issues?
- ☐ Do you encourage students and staff to provide opportunities for entertaining and servicing the community?
- ☐ Do you speak to community and service groups at least three times a year?
- ☐ Do you brag with sensible pride about the accomplishments of your staff and students?
- ☐ Do you use your outdoor message board for substantive achievement messages (e.g., 20 students inducted into National Honor Society) instead of "Have a Nice Day!"
- ☐ Are you aware of the various publics in your school's attendance area and which audiences need special attention from your school building?
- ☐ Do you support parent groups and provide assistance in any way you can?
- ☐ Do you encourage your teachers to communicate more effectively with their students' parents? Do you provide the resources and supplies (telephones, good news stationery, etc.) to help them in this area?

- ☐ Do you provide flexible hours for counselors to work and meet with parents?
- ☐ Do you open your building and playing facilities for community groups?
- ☐ Do you orient new staff members and substitute teachers?
- ☐ Do you say or write "thank you" to students, staff, and community residents who make extra efforts?
- ☐ Do you use the four-point communication test when decisions are made:
  - (1) Who needs to know this?
  - (2) What do they need to know?
  - (3) What is the best time and vehicle to communicate this?
  - (4) How will we know the message has been received?
- ☐ Do you attend workshops on PR and take a few staff members with you?
- ☐ Do you encourage staff and students to create special activities that shed a positive light on your school building?
- ☐ Do you hold "family meetings" when all building employees get together—just not the teaching staff?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Teachers

- ☐ Do you provide a positive role model for your students and parents?
- ☐ Do you call parents with good news as well as bad?
- ☐ Do you send "good news notes" or other complimentary notes to students and fellow staff members?
- ☐ Do you, at the beginning of each school year, ask parents what will help you to be a more effective teacher for their children either by a phone call, letter, of visit?
- ☐ Do you inform parents of your homework policy?
- ☐ Do you attempt to arrange parent conferences at a mutually convenient time?
- ☐ Do you make a parent conference an opportunity to learn more about helping your student?
- ☐ Do you make the parent conference an opportunity to learn more about helping your student?
- ☐ Do you attend open houses and special events sponsored by your school's parent group?
- ☐ Do you volunteer to help a student group in a community activity?
- ☐ Do you end class activities with the question, "What did we learn in class today?"
- ☐ Do you provide "Friday folders" or a "log of accomplishment" for students to demonstrate to parents and others what they did in school this week?
- ☐ Do you check out a rumor when you hear it?
- ☐ If conditions allow, do you visit homes of parents who cannot attend special conferences at school?
- ☐ Do you praise your students in a public setting?
- ☐ Do you inform your principal or school PR person of special events or accomplishments in your classroom or school building before they occur?
- ☐ Do you treat all school employees or colleagues as professionals?
- ☐ Do you offer your special expertise to the district's speakers' bureau—if it has one?
- ☐ Do you provide meaningful work for school volunteers and treat them as professional colleagues?
- ☐ Do you promptly return phone calls from parents?
- ☐ Are you aware of school policies and regulations concerning your range of responsibilities?
- ☐ Could you give a five-minute speech on the positive influence your school has on your students?
- ☐ Could you give a 15-minute speech on what is right with American education?
- ☐ Do you volunteer for district-wide or building-level PR projects or activities?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Guidance Counselors

The following list was adapted from guidelines developed by Shirley Williamson, ASPR, with the Kentucky Department of Education.

- ☐ Have you worked with the sponsor of your school newspaper and discussed regular coverage of guidance news?
- ☐ Do you know the person at your local newspaper/radio/TV station you should contact for a story?
- ☐ Do you have an orientation program for incoming students and their parents?
- ☐ Do you have an orientation for new students who transfer in after school starts?
- ☐ Have you developed a brochure to explain your guidance program to students and parents and community?
- ☐ Do you attend your state's annual Personnel and Guidance Association meeting?
- ☐ Have you explained the guidance program at one school board meeting each year?
- ☐ Have you attended a workshop, conference, or graduate course for your own personal growth during the past year?
- ☐ Do you develop articles or feature stories about the guidance program for the local newspaper each year?
- ☐ Do you have written plans or guides for a guidance PR program for your school?
- ☐ Do you have news from the guidance department in each issue of the school newspaper?
- ☐ Do you frequently talk each year to local civic and service organizations?
- ☐ Do you make a minimum of three explanations of guidance programs at school faculty meetings?
- ☐ Do you make reports about the guidance program at at least one administrative staff meeting annually?
- ☐ Do you talk to a minimum of four school clubs and organizations each year about the guidance program?
- ☐ Do you call parents with good news about their children?
- ☐ Do you schedule convenient appointments with parents?
- ☐ Where appropriate, do you send bilingual messages home?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Secretaries

Do you have these items in your personal secretaries' survival kit:

- ☐ Map of the district?
- ☐ Map of the school attendance area?
- ☐ Basics of the grading system?
- ☐ List of school board members, their addresses, and phone numbers?
- ☐ Names, mailing addresses, and office phone numbers for district administrators?
- ☐ List of all school personnel?
- ☐ District directory showing who does what for whom and who should be called in various situations?
- ☐ School and district calendars?
- ☐ Enrollment figures for each school building and the entire district?
- ☐ Information on district finances, taxes, and bond issues?
- ☐ Tuition rates for out-of-district students?
- ☐ Listing of educational acronyms—the ABC's of educationese for the parents who still speak English instead of pedogese?
- ☐ Lists of PTA or PTO leaders, their addresses, and phone numbers?
- ☐ Bus schedules?
- ☐ School health rules?
- ☐ Discipline handbook?
- ☐ List of various community agencies designed to assist parents and students?
- ☐ Course catalog for your school and feeder schools?
- ☐ Emergency phone numbers, such as police, sheriff, paramedics?
- ☐ Listing of extracurricular activities available for students (including things like Scouts and Park & Recreation programs, child care centers, even though they're not really school-sponsored)?
- ☐ School employee handbook?
- ☐ List of fees for books, classes, clubs, or other activities?
- ☐ Menu for the school lunch program, along with information on lunch costs and help for students who cannot pay full price?
- ☐ Emergency telephone numbers in schools (pay-phone numbers)?
- ☐ Crisis communication plan?
- ☐ Yearbook and school newspaper for visitors?
- ☐ Local restaurant numbers for visitors?
- ☐ List of adult/community education courses available?
- ☐ Use of school facilities by outside groups?

Additional PR checklist items for secretaries are:

Do you answer the telephone promptly?

- ☐ Do you exude a friendly but professional "how-may-I-help-you" tone on the telephone?

- ☐ Do you help your administrator in presenting a "welcome-to-our-office" climate in your immediate office area?
- ☐ Do you alert your administrator of repetitive complaints you may be hearing from staff, students, and parents?
- ☐ Do you ensure that all materials being sent home are readable and professional looking?
- ☐ Do you assist your administrator by having all parental addresses and phone numbers up to date as soon as possible after the school year begins?
- ☐ Do you speak well about where you work?
- ☐ Do you volunteer to serve on district-wide or building PR activities?
- ☐ Do you attend PTA and faculty meetings as well as special student events?
- ☐ Are you helpful to new teachers, substitute teachers, and new students?
- ☐ Do you know and use the capabilities of your telephone system?
- ☐ Do you volunteer PR or communication ideas to your administration?
- ☐ Do you know "who does what" in your building and school district?
- ☐ Do you meet regularly with other school secretaries to improve your skills and share winning ideas?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Standards for PR Pro

NSPRA has developed standards for educational public relations professionals and the following checklist was adapted from those standards. (NSPRA standards are listed in the Appendix.)

General Standards

- ☐ Do you understand and accept the role of education in a free society?
- ☐ Do you understand and accept the role and social responsibility of public relations for all educational institutions in a free society?
- ☐ Are you committed to the improvement of educational opportunity for all?
- ☐ Do you maintain professional performance and ethical behavior in educational public relations?

Professional Preparation

- ☐ Do you have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university?
- ☐ Have you studied areas of public relations, behavioral science, management, and education?

Experience

- ☐ Do you have a minimum of two years' full-time experience in an executive public relations responsibility with an educational organization or one of six equivalents listed by NSPRA?

Demonstrated Ability

- ☐ Do you employ effective human relation practices in the performance of PR responsibilities?
- ☐ Do you perceive, identify, and determine the implication of educational PR problems?
- ☐ Do you create, propose, and conduct activities to solve educational public relations problems?
- ☐ Do you conduct continuous PR activities that depend on the nature, structure, and function of mass media?
- ☐ Do you plan, develop, and execute specific PR projects essential to campaigns, interpretations of innovations, or other major activities?
- ☐ Do you identify and work with elements of power structures?
- ☐ Do you identify and work with individuals and citizens' groups in the development and execution of the PR program?
- ☐ Do you involve staff in the development and execution of the organization's PR program?
- ☐ Do you exhibit a working knowledge of comprehensive internal and external programs?
- ☐ Do you demonstrate a mastery of communication skills?
- ☐ Do you exhibit sensitivity to two-way communication?

Professional Growth and Development

- ☐ Do you maintain membership and participate in NSPRA and other professional associations?
- ☐ Do you participate in the NSPRA national seminar and other PR workshops and conferences?

- ☐ Do you pursue additional graduate school study in pertinent areas?
- ☐ Do you read, research, write, speak, and consult in PR?

- ☐ Do you seek NSPRA accreditation?

Do you seek NSPRA accreditation?

Criteria for Publications

The following criteria were established by NSPRA for evaluating publications.

- ☐ Does the design tell the reader at a glance what the publication is about?
- ☐ Does the layout typography make the publication easy to read? Does it have columns, white space, subheads, etc.?
- ☐ Does the publication follow the 30-3-30 principle, offering something to a reader whether he or she is going to spend 30 seconds, 3 minutes, or 30 minutes on it?
- ☐ Do the graphics and art work enhance the printed word (including quality printing, color, or paper stock, ink, etc.)?
- ☐ Are pictures large, clear, well cropped, and show live action? Is there a caption for most pictures?
- ☐ Do you follow these guidelines: If typeset, a serif type is usually recommended and body type should be 9, 10, or 11 pt. Copy lines should be no longer than two alphabets or 52 characters.
- ☐ Do headlines use action words and are they set in caps and lower case? (Sans serif type is most frequently used.)
- ☐ Is the writing style suitable to the audience for which the publication is targeted and is the style maintained through the publication? Would the material pass "Gunning Fox Index" level of grade 9 for general writing?
- ☐ Is there a good lead to capture the reader's attention?
- ☐ Are articles written in inverted pyramid format with key points in the first paragraph, especially in newsletters?
- ☐ Is publication material written for the information needs and interests of the audience for which it is designed?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

Criteria for Radio/Video Programs

The following criteria were established by NSPRA for evaluating radio and videotape programs.

Audio Portion

- ☐ Is the sound crisp, clear, and free of clicks, pops, static, and other distracting annoyances? Is it of sufficient dynamic range to be considered "broadcast quality"?
- ☐ Is the narration/copy delivered in an easy style without sounding as if it were read?
- ☐ Is the music and/or live-recorded sound woven in and out of the production smoothly to support the objective of the production?

Visual

- ☐ Are charts, graphs, and title slides simplified almost to the point of austerity--no body copy and good use of color? Is the concept of the production clear within a six-second's viewing?
- ☐ Does it avoid one-camera, one-person talking? (Television thrives on motion and color which viewers have come to expect.)
- ☐ Is the production done in colors of a "pleasing" tonal range (no unnatural color balances or color shifts apparent)? Is everything in proper focus with smooth visual transitions from start to finish? (Network-quality productions are not expected, but a basic professional-quality production is a minimum.)
- ☐ Are backgrounds (or sets and scenery, where used) simple, nondistracting, and appropriate for the production?

Content

- ☐ Is the content simple, acknowledging that broadcast media cannot be reread. One concept in public service announcements is to use small words, short sentences, and action verbs.
- ☐ Is material in standard lengths; for example:
  - 10-, 20-, 30-, or 60-second lengths for public service announcements?
  - Even timing for a TV slot (10:00, 15:00, 14:00, etc., depending upon length; none at 17:20 or an equally odd figure)?
  - No more than 15 minutes for an "ideal" slide tape show—6 to 10 slides per minute?
  - Does the production come to a conclusion; e.g., "call xxx-xxxx" for this or "vote yes" for that?

Other

- ☐ If students are involved on camera, behind scenes, etc., are they noted in the production credits?
- ☐ Is the production local in nature, involving local people or concerning local topics and issues?
- ☐ Does the production help to create a positive, dynamic image for the sponsoring institution? Does it elicit participation of the listener or viewer in the activities of the institution?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

One District's PR Evaluation Statement

The following is the evaluation statement of the "Plan for Department of Public Information and Communication" for the Portland Public School (Oregon):

The Department of Public Information's evaluation of its various programs will consist of using a number of opinion survey formats and the establishment of several monitoring processes.

Opinion surveys will be relied on for monitoring the department's efforts using mass media. Parents, non-parents, employees, and students will be polled from time to time, using many questions already "benchmarked" from previous surveys.

Specifically designed monitoring projects will be established for the district's press coverage, speaker's bureaus, volunteers, and school users. Opinion polls for these department projects may also be designed and conducted.

The use of shorter surveys, conducted more frequently, will be a new process adopted by the department. Conducting our own surveys with in-house processing and analysis will become the norm, although outside firms will be employed for surveying the larger audiences.

The overall objectives of this evaluation process are to: (1) assesss the level of effectiveness for each of the department's communications processes; (2) assess how well the department is meeting the information needs of the district's various constituencies; and (3) continue, modify, or change elements of this communications plan to meet the district's goals, objectives, or immediate needs better.

Tips and Techniques on PR Evaluation

So far, this guidebook has described three approaches to evaluation--use of the program instrument, communication audits, and evaluating objectives. The major theme throughout these techniques and those listed below is **feedback.** We need to listen carefully to our publics just the way Peters and Worerman espouse being "close to the customer" in the best seller, In Search of Excellence.

What follows is a list of tips and techniques on evaluation. Some call for formal and expensive listening techniques while others provide informal, inexpensive feedback.

- If you conduct a workshop or make a presentation at a meeting, distribute a simple evaluation form so the audience can rate the effectiveness of the program.

- If you're concerned about the effectiveness of your media relations effort, clip the coverage of your school district and tally the inches of "good" vs. "not-so-good" stories (and log the minutes of TV or radio air time the same way). This "content analysis" approach is one step beyond the "column inch" approach to evaluation.

- If you want to know how effective your newsletter is, ask. Some district schools print a brief questionnaire in it and ask the readers to cut it out and send it back. The response rate, however, is usually poor. Others insert a postage-paid card in a small percentage of your mailings. Easier yet, have someone in your office make a few random phone calls. The results won't be scientifically reliable, but they'll tell you something about the value of your newsletter, especially if the people you call never heard of it!

- Use any mailing list you have—not just your newsletter readers—to ask a few pertinent questions. These can be staff people who get your internal memos or advisory committee members you try to keep in touch with. Again, there may be no scientific validity to the results, but if there's something seriously wrong, you'll get the idea.

- Ask for some feedback at parent-teacher conferences. When the conference is over, have the teacher give each parent a short questionnaire about some aspect of your program. That captive audience is often overlooked.

- A key communicator network is a valuable way to take the pulse of the community. Influential people (and they don't have to be community leaders or office-holders) can help a school district a great deal, not only by serving as a key communication link to the public, but also as sources of information about how the community is reacting to what you are doing. Use this group often. Call them once a week and chat. Try lofting a trial balloon once in a while. You can learn a lot from them.

- Establish a planning and goal-setting process with key staff members. Periodically assess your program to see if it's on course.

- Implement a time-budget system of evaluation in which each PR staff member logs how he/she spends the day. Analyze time-on-task to see if you should set new priorities.

- Document your tangible products. Consider measuring number of: contacts made with media, publications produced, people receiving publications, speeches given, in-service workshops offered, and attendance at special PR programs. Recordkeeping is time-consuming, but important.

- Seek feedback from a council of PTA presidents. See which items they consider to be effective and what ideas they have to strengthen communication.

Measuring Column Inches

Some advertising agencies and school PR people still use the "column inch" approach to evaluation. This approach can be useful when the major thrust of the PR program is media relations and when the column inches reflect the assistance and efforts of the PR office. Frequently it is helpful to do a content analysis of the clippings to see a breakdown of positive, neutral, and negative stories, as well as topics covered by the media. Some PR specialists also convert the column inches to dollars by explaining what the coverage would have cost the district in advertising fees. However, the effect of the coverage on readers is usually not measured in the "column inch" evaluation.

A report to a superintendent on the column inches may look like this:

STATISTICS

I continue to tabulate the amount of news space that we receive in the Daily Planet compared to the other seven school districts in its circulation area.

The following figures are column inches in the month of May and the totals from August 1 through May 31, excluding sports.

School District	May	School Year
A	289.5	1,302.5
B	469.0	4,226.5
C	272.0	1,372.0
D	199.0	1,330.5
E	262.5	2,071.0
F	605.0	3,843.5
G	203.0	897.0
H	90.0	764.0

Conclusions: Our school district is getting far better coverage than other school districts in the county. This is despite the fact that Education Editor Lois Lane is making a conscious effort to provide equal coverage. I believe the secret to success has been press releases.

Caution: Informal Feedback May Be Hazardous To Your PR Program's Health

The fundamental premise—**bad information is worse than no information at all**—should serve as a guiding factor when interpreting results of informal feedback techniques.

Informal surveys, man-in-the-street assessments, and instant telephone polling of PTA presidents will give you a sense of what your parents, taxpayers, or staff may be thinking. But don't abandon or start any major initiative based on a small, sometimes questionable, informal "pulse" of the community.

Use informal feedback techniques to indicate, not identify, your community or staff opinions. Use formal survey techniques to produce valid results in making major decisions about the PR program.

- Analyze the results of financial referendum elections precinct by precinct. Conduct a post-election review if you win and a public opinion poll if you lose to find out what went wrong.
- Study whom the reporters call. Is it the PR office, the superintendent, other administrators, or board members? That tally may offer clues to the quality and responsiveness of the PR program or it may reflect a policy of the school district or newspaper to go directly to the source of information.
- Form a staff communications team to meet monthly to review coverage and to preview what will be coming up before the next meeting. Have this group also consider long-range concerns.
- Telephone residents to measure opinions and attitudes on issues on which your PR program is currently focusing.
- Monitor call-in radio show(s) for comments about your school.
- Keep a file of letters to the editor and media editorials.
- Consider the checklist approach to evaluation for a systematic review of your PR structure and function. (Use the checklists available in this publication.) This checklist approach won't tell you if your program is effective, but it will provide a snapshot of your organizational strengths and weaknesses.
- Call together focus groups or panels of your key internal and external publics together and ask them to rate the effectiveness of your PR effort. A sampling of focus groups could include media, non-parents, service personnel, parents, and business leaders. Such groups also assist in evaluating building-level programs.
- Consider "hiring" a volunteer to assist your office in organizing and implementing your evaluation effort. The extra assistance can provide the necessary effort needed to document facts for your evaluation report.
- Ask your switchboard operator or other clerical support staff members (if you have a decentralized phone system) to monitor issues or complaints. Such feedback can be helpful in evaluating and planning your PR program.
- Scientifically survey your community on various issues at least once a year. Hire a consultant or establish your own scientific survey process as described in the NSPRA publication, Survey Feedback. Make sure your process is scientific or critics will easily discount your results. Attempt to "piggyback" evaluation questions with other surveys planned throughout the year.
- Make evaluation post cards available in public spots throughout your community.

Focus on issues on which you want opinions. Place them in grocery stores, dry cleaning establishments, doctors' offices, convenience stores, banks, and other "people centers" in your community.

- If your system uses public service announcements (PSAs), consider using "bounce back cards" when you deliver a PSA to your radio station. Cards ask the station to list the frequency with which it ran the PSA and the number of people reached. You can also include questions to help in the future about length and type of spot referred, estimated number of weeks aired, times aired, what local tagging is necessary, and type of identification.

- Enter your publications or PSAs in a competition, such as the NSPRA publication contest, and seek a critique to help strengthen your products.

- Ask the input of your state or province NSPRA chapter or coordinator if the chapters offer critique of products communication audits.

- Measure the community involvement factor in your school system. Has it increased or decreased because of the PR program or was the increase tied to a controversial issue such as closing schools?

- Find out if school employees use the services of the PR office or if they avoid using your office for assistance. When principals receive calls from reporters, do they seek your advice or not even inform you of the call? Do principals seek assistance for their building-level PR efforts? Most highly respected PR offices receive calls from various staff members for information or assistance with a PR project. Frequent requests from employees is a healthy evaluation sign for the PR office.

- Form a community advisory council on public relations to assist you in evaluating the PR program. Provide various approaches for the group to consider--

Using Computers in Evaluation

Computers are beginning to make PR evaluation techniques easier. Since a considerable portion of evaluation deals with documentation and survey techniques, computers can be of great assistance. Surveys of staff and residents, targeting audiences, and general storage and managing of documentable results are all enhanced by the PR office with a micro- or mini-computer.

Two examples from NSPRA members are:

- Clem Cleveland, ASPR, Director of Public Relations of the Benton Harbor Schools in Michigan has modified a software system to tabulate and analyze surveys for school districts and PR programs.

- Scott Tilden, ASPR, Director of College Publications and Information Services for the Mercer County Community College in Trenton, NJ, is using his computer for the quantitative evaluation of his news bureau successes. The computer program provides equivalent advertising cost for news space and analyzes output by newspaper, by category of story, and by news release to see which releases received what amount of coverage from which paper.

If you have a computer in your PR office or are building a case with your superintendent or business manager to buy one, add evaluation assistance as another function the computer can help you complete.

audits, checklists, surveys—and then only serve as a resource assistant to the group. Include a board member, administrator, principal, teacher, service personnel, parents, and non-parents in the group. Make sure the council understands its timeline and charges and that it receives all the information it needs to complete its task.

- Hire a consultant to assess your PR program. Make sure the consultant's background fits the task. Ideally, a consultant should bring to your district an understanding of education in your state, a knowledge of school public relations, and successful practical experience in school PR. Always seek and call references.

- Plot a grid to see how many of the targeted publics in your district you are effectively reaching. Highly rated PR programs reach targeted audiences with targeted messages. It is easy to mail the same newsletter to all audiences, but it is more difficult to target the content of one newsletter for all audiences.

Evaluation Timetable

A timetable for an annual evaluation of the PR program can be based on a typical school year calendar.

July	• Modify and/or formulate goals and objectives of the PR program for the coming year (or other specific evaluation period).
August	• Plan communications activities with those publics identified through the program goals and objectives.
September-June	• Implement communications activities with those public identified through the program goals and objectives.
September-June	• Design and direct evaluation information-gathering tasks as required.
June	• Assimilate evaluation data and prepare report along with recommendations to improve weak areas identified.
June	• Report evaluation findings to publics involved in study. Give report to Superintendent and Board of Election.
July	• Modify and/or formulate goals and objectives of the PR program for the coming year (or other specific evaluation period) in light of evaluation results.
August-June	• Repeat process.

Everything Is Not Measurable

NSPRA realizes that everything associated with school PR is not measurable. The good will professed by school employees who go one step further in communicating with parents or in coordinating a special activity is difficult to assess on a district-wide basis. But, such instances shouldn't go unnoticed in any evaluation report. Some examples are:

- A kindergarten teacher has taught for so many years that she is now teaching children of former students. She annually takes her students to dinner --three or four at a time. Those former students who now have youngsters in her class remember the experience and look forward to their own kids' enjoying it as well. The teacher works in a school in a low-income neighborhood and many of these same children have never eaten in a restaurant before their dinner with the teacher.

- A special PTA meeting for parents of outgoing eighth graders and incoming sixth graders is often a well-attended session for a middle school PTA. The parents of the "soon-to-be-sixth graders" want to know what is going to happen to their children during the next three years and the parents of the eighth graders are usually glad to share their middle school experiences.

- When the local bus returned later than expected, the custodian was the only adult left in the high school building. He noticed that one student remained in the corridor long after the other students departed. He approached the student and realized he didn't have any change to call for a ride home. The custodian lent him the money and received a thank you from the parents the next day.

- The student government association frequently provides parking assistance for parents at back-to-school night, as well as serving as tour guides throughout the evening.

- Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled at convenient times for parents and flex-time or overtime is arranged for teachers and counselors who meet with parents during non-school hours.

- Student groups invite senior citizens to special productions of the school plays and offer holiday events both in the schools and in senior citizen centers. Students write thank-you notes to individual senior citizens and senior citizen leaders.

- The school nurse calls home at 8:30 P.M. to check on the fifth grade student who fell off the playground jungle gym and twisted her ankle.

- The principal sends hand-written thank you notes to staff, students, and parents who do outstanding work.

- The transportation coordinator checks out discipline problems at bus stops and reassures a non-parent that the school district will repair her damaged fence.

- School board members regularly attends co-curricular functions, such as the induction into the National Honor Society, science fairs, etc.

- Board members send thank-you notes to staff, students, media representatives, and administrators for a job well done.

- The staff and parents of an elementary school annually surprise the students at that school with a special day. Last year, the theme as "A Sea Affair." This year they turned the school into an aerospace museum. Parents helped determine the theme and did the lion's share of the work—over 60% of the school's parents helped. This year all the rooms were appropriately renamed--the kitchen became the galley, for example, and one end of the library became an air and space museum, including a full-sized hot air balloon and a specially created moon walk room. Frontier Airlines donated airline dinners for lunch one day and a local advertising firm designed a color-me poster for the occasion.

Conclusion

"You can't tell which way the train went by looking at the tracks."

Kramer's Law

Kramer's Law relates well to evaluation and school public relations. You need to take action to assess how effective your school PR program is. Willingness to carry out and act upon a comprehensive evaluation program is a mark of a true professional. PR professionals and other school district leaders need to step back and take a dispassionate look at what they are doing and how effectively they are doing it. Evaluation activities separate the publicity/PR hypetypes from the professional managers of comprehensive school PR programs.

Evaluation won't provide all the answers for a PR program, but it will present an opportunity to recognize what the PR program has accomplished and also permit the school district to strengthen weaknesses uncovered by the evaluation. Support for the PR program usually grows after a comprehensive evaluation because more people begin to understand what the PR program is intending to do.

Strive to weave an evaluation thread into every aspect of your PR program. Use the results to demonstrate that school PR does make a visible difference in your school community. Seize the initiative now before someone else questions, "Why do we need this PR program, anyway?"

Appendix

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Standards for Educational Public Relations Programs

Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Educational public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and information activities which earn public understanding and support.

I. Concept

A. Policy

1. The organization shall adopt a clear and concise public relations policy statement.

2. The policy statement shall be approved through formal action of the organization's governing body, shall be published in its policy manual, and shall be reviewed annually by the governing body.

3. The policy statement shall express the purposes of the organization's public relations program and shall provide for the delegation of authority to appropriate executives.

B. Procedures

1. Management shall clarify the public relations policies through the development of written operational procedures.

2. The procedures shall outline major components of the public relations programs, detail rules and regulations, and specify employee roles and responsibilities.

3. The procedures shall be distributed to all employees and representatives of key external publics.

II. Resources

Commitment to the achievement of the purposes of the organization's public relations policy shall be demonstrated through the allocation of adequate human and financial resources to the public relations program.

A. Staff

1. The staffing of a public relations program will vary according to an oragnization's size, needs, and availability of resources. In every situation, however, the responsibility shall be assigned to an individual who reports directly to the chief executive officer and who participates as a full member of the administrative cabinet.

2. Recognition of public relations as a management function of primary importance shall be demonstrated through the existence of a unit staffed by full-time professional public relations personnel. Staff size shall be sufficient to accomplish the objectives of the organization and to cope with the variety of inherent conditions and problems.

3. The public relations staff shall meet NSPRA's Standards for Educational Public Relations Professionals.

4. Provision shall be made for continuous training and development for members of the public relations staff.

B. Budget

1. The organization's budget shall include a specific item for public relations staffing, services, and programs.

2. The amount of the public relations budget will vary according to organizational needs. However, in addition to staff, appropriate provisions shall be made for the following: materials and equipment; facilities; technical services (publications, advertising, audiovisual, radio, television, etc.); involvement activities; professional growth and development; research and evaluation.

3. Provisions shall be made for appropriate public relations activities in the budgets of each of the organization's major departments and programs.

III. Internal Communications

The basic foundation of the organization's public relations program shall be a sound and effective system of internal communications.

A. Planning

1. The organization shall develop a written plan which identifies key internal audiences, as well as procedures for determining the kind of information they need and desire.

2. Each major department, program, or unit in the organization shall develop appropriate communications strategies based on the overall plan.

B. Implementation

1. An appropriate variety of communications methods shall be used, including vehicles for encouraging, receiving, analyzing, and using feedback.

2. A continuing public relations training program shall be provided for the entire staff or membership of the organization.

IV. External Communications

The organization shall be committed to ongoing, creative efforts to inform and involve external publics.

A. Planning

1. The organization shall develop a written plan which identifies key community individuals and groups, as well as procedures for determining the kind of information they need and desire.

2. Each major department, program or unit in the organization will develop appropriate communications strategies based on the overall plan.

B. Implementation

1. An appropriate variety of communications methods shall be used.

2. Special efforts shall be made to encourage, receive, analyze, and use feedback.

3. Strategies shall be developed to identify and involve community resources.

V. Accountability

A. Program Performance

1. The organization shall provide for evaluation of the public relations program based on proposed objectives and the degree to which they have been achieved.

2. The staff or membership of the organization shall be included in any evaluation process.

B. Development

1. The organization shall provide for long-range public relations planning.

2. The organization shall develop a plan for anticipating, preparing for, and dealing with the public relations aspects of unusual or crisis situations.

3. Emphasis shall be given to seeking and developing new and different avenues of communications and relationships.

Standards for Educational Public Relations Professionals

An educational public relations professional is a person who performs public relations functions in a staff or executive capacity with an educational organization.

I. General Standards

General standards for an educational public relations professional shall include:

A. Understanding and acceptance of the role of education in a free society.

B. Understanding and acceptance of the role and social responsibility of public relations for all educational institutions, organizations, and agencies in a free society.

C. Commitment to the improvement of educational opportunity for all.

D. Professional performance and ethical behavior in educational public relations as described in NSPRA's Ethics for Educational Public Relations.

II. Specific Standards

A. Professional Preparation

1. Minimum of a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited college or university.

2. Study in the area of public relations, behavioral sciences, management, and education.

B. Experience

Standards for experience shall include at least one of the following:

1. Two years' full-time experience in an executive public relations responsibility with an educational organization.

2. Three years' full-time experience (or the equivalent time) in a staff public relations responsibility with an educational organization.

3. Three years' full-time experience in an executive public relations responsibility with an organization outside the area of education, plus one year in a professional capacity with an educational organization.

4. Four years' full-time experience in a staff public relations responsibility with an organization outside the area of education plus one year in a professional capacity with an educational organization.

5. Four years' full-time experience in mass communications (press, radio, television, etc.) with news, editorial or program responsibilities, plus one year in a professional capacity with an educational organization.

6. Five years' full-time experience in a professional capacity with an educational organization, plus one year in a full-time public relations responsibility.

7. Three years' full-time experience as a college teacher of school public relations or related communications courses, plus one year in a full-time public relations responsibility with an educational organization or three years of significant public relations consultant experience to educational organizations.

C. Demonstrated Ability

Standards for demonstrated ability shall include, in general, a working knowledge of comprehensive internal and external public relations programs, a mastery of basic communications skills, and a sensitivity to the importance of two-way communication.

Specifically, the educational public relations professional shall demonstrate these abilities through the following:

1. Employing effective human relations practices in the performance of public relations responsibilities.

2. Perceiving, identifying, and determining the implications of educational public relations problems.

3. Creating, proposing, and conducting activities designed to solve educational public relations problems.

4. Conducting continuous public relations activities that depend on the nature, structure, and functions of mass media.

5. Planning, developing, and executing specific public relations projects essential to campaigns, interpretation of innovations, or other major activities.

6. Planning, developing, and using feedback processes, including opinion surveys.

7. Identifying and working with elements of power structures.

8. Identifying and working with individuals and citizens groups in the development and execution of the organization's program.

9. Involving staff and/or members of the organization in the development and execution of the organization's public relations program.

D. Professional Growth and Development

Standards for professional growth and development require that educational public relations professionals continue to refine skills and expand knowledge through:

1. Maintaining membership and participation in NSPRA and other professional public relations associations and societies.

2. Participating in the NSPRA National Seminar and other recognized public relations seminars, conferences, workshops, and institutes.

3. Pursuing additional study beyond Bachelor's Degree requirements in pertinent areas.

4. Reading, researching, writing, speaking, and consulting in public relations.

5. Seeking NSPRA accreditation.

NSPRA Code of Ethics

The educational public relations professional shall:

I. Be guided constantly by pursuit of the public interest through truth, accuracy, good taste, and fairness -

- following good judgment in releasing information
- not intentionally disseminating misinformation or confidential data
- avoiding actions which lessen personal, professional or organizational reputation

II. Give primary loyalty to the employing organization, insisting on the right to give advisory counsel in accordance with sound public relations ideas and practices -

- cooperating with other groups while avoiding conflicts with primary responsibilities
- objecting to untenable or unethical policies and activities

III. Be aware of personal influence, avoiding promises or granting of unprofessional advantages to others -

- refraining from accepting special considerations for influence on organizational decisions
- refraining from unauthorized use of organizational facilities, resources or professional services for personal gain or for promotion of the candidacy of aspirants for elected offices.

IV. Recognize that effectiveness is dependent upon integrity and regard for ideas of the profession -

- not misrepresenting professional qualifications
- giving credit for ideas and words borrowed from others
- cooperating with professional colleagues to uphold and enforce this Code.

NSPRA Profile

The mission of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), founded in 1935, is to build support and an information base for education through responsible communications.

NSPRA, based in the Washington, D.C. area, sees its prime function as one of assisting educators and education leaders to obtain the information needed to do their jobs and to become more sensitive and skilled in their dealings with students, staff, parents and the total community. The Association is a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization.

NSPRA's current constituency is composed of public and private school administrators, school board members, school public relations officers, and college and university professors. NSPRA also serves other education agency staff and community members who need information or share an interest in the responsible practice of school public relations.

NSPRA publications stress practical, "how-to" techniques on such topics as building public confidence in education, news media relations, producing publications, community involvement, conducting finance campaigns and staff development workshops, and parent-teacher conferences. NSPRA is known for its concise, authoritative books on education issues, such as declining enrollments, educating the handicapped and the gifted and talented, school/business partnerships, characteristics of good schools and good teachers, involving non-parents, excellence and other key issues.

NSPRA provides many direct support services to local educators, including teachers, support staff members, board members, principals, central office administrators as well as news media representatives. These services include on-site consulting, a telephone "hotline" counseling service, access to an organized talent bank network and to NSPRA's extensive national resource file.

NSPRA also conducts an annual national public relations seminar to introduce the basics of educational communication and public relations to those just beginning in the profession and to provide professional development opportunities for experienced education leaders on new practices, technologies and developments in the expanding area of communications. Regional seminars are conducted annually throughout the country, and a network of 43 state NSPRA chapters provides a way for members and other educators to assist one another throughout the year.

The association sponsors the only national awards program recognizing outstanding school public relations programs, a national school and college publications contest, chapter award programs, and an annual program to honor an outstanding member for achievements in the school public relations field.

Since 1958, NSPRA has published Education USA, an independent weekly newsletter to brief education leaders on major education developments nationwide. Twenty-six years later, Education USA continues to be one of the most widely read newsletters in the education field.

Three years ago, NSPRA made a bold, risky decision to inaugurate education's first electronic news service. Education USA Newsline, using a computer network to provide up-to-the-minute news for educators.

Transmitted twice-daily, the service is available throughout the United States and more than 40 other countries. The two-way, interactive electronic service quickly expanded beyond news to provide ready-reference information, statistics, Supreme Court decision summaries, reviews of research, technology assistance, tracking of major federal legislation, communication and public relations tips, and other critically needed, time-sensitive material. The entire service, including the twice-daily news services, is called ED-LINE.

To learn more about NSPRA, contact the association at (703) 528-5840.

NSPRA Resources

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) provides many resources to its members and other interested school leaders and citizens through its many publications and contracted services. A partial list of helpful resources includes:

- **NSPRA Membership:** As a member of the National School Public Relations Association, you receive Paragraphs, the association newsletter that keeps you abreast of the latest techniques and happenings in the school public relations profession; Scanner, a look at emerging issues and how they affect education; and NSPRA's journal on school public relations, which gives a more in-depth review of current practices and research. As an NSPRA member, you can also take advantage of the PR Hotline Counseling Service, which provides assistance to you in solving an imminent PR problem. Various classifications of memberships are available and all NSPRA members receive a 10% discount on NSPRA products.

- **NSPRA Consultative Services:** NSPRA offers a wide variety of consultative services providing one-day speeches and workshops, communication audits, and a communication service contract that delivers ongoing assistance to your school district.

- **NSPRA National Seminar:** Each July, an intensive, four-day seminar provides in-service training for PR specialists and education leaders interested in learning more about school PR.

- **NSPRA Subscription Services:**

  - It Starts in the Classroom: Nine issues of practical PR tips and techniques for teachers and administrators are offered by this highly respected newsletter. It is published September through May.

  - Education USA: Published weekly, this newsletter gives you the latest in education news and information. It is written in a style geared for busy school administrators and keeps you posted on the latest trends in education.

  - EdLine: EdLine is the electronic computer news and information network of the National School Public Relations Association. It offers transmission of education news twice a day, along with other

information lines to assist you in educational technology, school public relations, etc. Subscribers to EdLine often begin "networking" with colleagues across the country to assist one another in solving mutual problems in education and public relations.

- **NSPRA Publications and Kits:**

  - Publications:

    . Building Public Confidence in Your Schools
    . Non-Parents and Schools: Creating a New Team
    . School Labor Strife: Rebuilding the Team
    . New Voices on the Right: Impact on Schools
    . Good Teachers: What to Look for
    . Good Schools: What Makes Them Work
    . Learn from the Winners: School PR Programs That Work
    . School PR Guides (Set of eight books)
    . Working with the Media
    . Publications for Effective Communications
    . Building-Level PR Programs
    . Internal Communications
    . Survey/Feedback
    . Involving All Your Publics
    . PR for Special Problems
    . PR Programs for Small, Suburban and Large Districts

  - Kits/Packets for Staff Development and In-Service Training:

    . NSPRA's Basic School PR Kit
    . School Communication Workshop Kit
    . Keys to Community Involvement
    . Lighting the Fire (Staff Renewal/Morale Building)
    . Principals' Survival Packet - Volumes I and II
    . You Can Win at the Polls
    . Reaching for Excellence

Prices, descriptions, and further information on all these services and products may be obtained by contacting NSPRA at:

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